



W I S C O N S I N C O U N T I E S A S S O C I A T I O N

Legislative Agenda

2025-2026



Dear State Leaders ...

There is no question that the most recent legislative session was the most successful two-year period for Wisconsin counties in a generation. The reshaping of shared revenue along with aligning state aid payments to growth in sales tax have assisted counties in delivering state-mandated services at the local level. Counties have long advocated for a renewed partnership between the state and county governments, and appreciate the progress made over the past 24 months.

Yet, as we enter the upcoming 2025-2026 legislative session, significant challenges present themselves for all 72 counties and the taxpayers they serve. The most restrictive property tax controls in the country combined with inflationary pressures driving the cost of providing local services leave many local officials questioning the sustainability of the current state-county funding model. And, as one-time federal funds have been exhausted at the local level, there are very few options to fund services the state mandates and taxpayers expect.

As we start this new legislative session, counties look forward to continued dialogue with state leaders. While these conversations will highlight the many innovative and cost-effective ways counties continue to deliver services, they must also cover the fiscal reality we live in – no longer can counties continue to deliver state-mandated services without increased investment from the state. Whether it be operating a state court system that is 70% funded by counties or human services programs where county investment outmatches the state ten-fold, we must continue to evaluate the effectiveness and sustainability of our funding structure. There is no question that counties serve as an “arm of the state” in many instances, but a strong state-local partnership is critical to ensuring our state remains a great place to live, work and raise a family.

Counties are optimistic that the upcoming legislative session can build off recent success and we will continue to provide services more efficiently and cost-effectively than anywhere else in the country with the help of our state partners. Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Kyle Christianson, *Vice President of Government Affairs*

Marcie Rainbolt, *Government Affairs Associate*

Chelsea Shanks, *Government Affairs Associate*



Agriculture, Environment, and Land Use

- **Increase funding for the county land conservation** staffing and cost-sharing grant to \$20.2 million in annual base funding.
- **Bolster state and county efforts** to identify and manage invasive species populations.
- **Restore and support the sustainability** of the state's forestry account.
- **Amend the definition** of "county forest administrator" in administrative code to include experience to ensure all qualified county foresters are eligible for state grant funding.
- **Develop a science-based framework** that minimizes the impacts of wake boats [e.g., shoreline erosion, water quality degradation, and aquatic invasive species introduction and transport] while promoting local control.
- **Improve the DATCP Farmland Preservation Program** by increasing the statewide Agricultural Enterprise Area acreage cap to 3 million acres.
- **Support funding** for advocacy, education and testing to address the proper use of and disposal of PFAS (Polyfluoroalkyl substances).
- **Ensure that counties have input** in the establishment of acceptable levels of PFAS concentrations in groundwater and surface waters.
- **Ensure counties have the ability** to provide input to the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in establishing groundwater quantity and quality criteria that are appropriate in each county and geologic region, reflecting decisions made at the local level.
- **Provide counties with flexibility and autonomy** regarding decisions made on shoreland zoning and other land use regulations.
- **Provide continued funding for recycling programs**, clean sweep, and medication collection programs.
- **Increase funding for conservation efforts** and support programs related to clean sweep, the Wisconsin Fund, agriculture and well testing.



Photo credit: Kristi Schramper, Barron County

- **Modify Wisconsin's livestock siting policy** and ensure such legislation provides for increased local control and local cost savings while providing for regulatory certainty and flexibility for the state's agricultural community.
- **Support long-term reauthorization** of the Knowles-Warren Stewardship Program, provided that local participation in the program is sufficiently preserved as determined by stakeholders. Further, amend state statutes to allow nature-based recreational development grants under the County Forest Subprogram.
- **Increase support for the wildlife habitat grant** from \$0.05 per acre to \$0.10 per acre and end the proration associated with the program.
- **Increase the Times Standard Hours** dedicated from the Division of Forestry to county forests from 46,000 to 52,000 hours.
- **Establish a \$25 fee** to be remitted to the proper town or county jurisdiction for the maintenance of UTV/ATV routes.
- **Clarify county authority** under Wis. Stats. 66.0401, relating to renewable energy siting requirements.
- **Provide counties with additional regulatory authority** relating to tourist rooming houses and the interplay between occupancy numbers and water treatment requirements.
- **Fully fund and fill all vacant positions** at the Center for Land Use Education (CLUE).
- **Establish a new program and funding** for performance monitoring of new and existing septic systems.



Transportation and Public Works



Photo credit: Jennifer Paasch, Manitowoc County

- **Build on the long-term funding solutions** passed in the 2023-25 biennial state budget to meet the state's transportation needs.
- **Continue investment in the maintenance** of the county trunk highway system by increasing funding for general transportation aid payments to counties in an amount equal to 30% of the costs.
- **Increase Mass Transit Operating Aids** to reflect the growing costs for counties.
- **Make additional investments** in the Local Road Improvement Program [LRIP].
- **Increase funding** for routine maintenance agreements (RMAs).
- **Increase funding for the Specialized Transportation Assistance** program for counties under Wis. Stat. 85.21.
- **Enact a new funding program** for local governments targeted at small bridge (6 feet to 20 feet) maintenance, repair, and replacement.
- **Establish automated speed** enforcement in work zones.
- **Prohibit the use of cellular devices** during the operation of a vehicle, with the exception of a "hands free" device.
- **Amend Wis. Stat. 32.28** such that the condemning authority shall assume responsibility for payment for all legal costs in the circumstances where a jury verdict, as approved by the court under Wis. Stat. 3205 (11), exceeds the jurisdictional offer or the highest written offer prior to the jurisdictional offer by at least the amount in the offer plus 30%.
- **Extend the supplemental appropriation** for local road repairs and reclamation of the county trunk highway system [LRIP-S].
- **Give counties complete control** of UTV/ATV usage on the county trunk highway system.



County Organization and Personnel

- **Support follow-up legislation** to 2023 WI Act 235, the Judicial Privacy Act, to clarify the proper intent of the law.
- **Eliminate the requirement** to publish board proceedings in the newspaper.
- **Increase funding for** the County Veterans Service Officers (CVSO) Improvement Grant.
- **Increase the competitive bidding threshold** from current levels to \$100,000, except for certain local government highway projects; change the publication requirements to allow more bids; and ensure all local governments comply with similar bidding thresholds.
- **Remove the requirement** to write the poll list number on ballots at central count locations.
- **Allow, through municipal ordinance,** the ability for clerks to canvass absentee ballots on the Monday before the election if they have the proper tabulating machines, security, and other provisions that ensure the integrity of the election.
- **Provide additional aids** to counties for the costs incurred to administer special elections including, but not limited to, the publication of required election notices, printing absentee ballots and envelopes, the design and printing of ballots and poll books, and programming electronic voting machines.
- **Allow counties to retain** a larger portion of the real estate transfer fee.

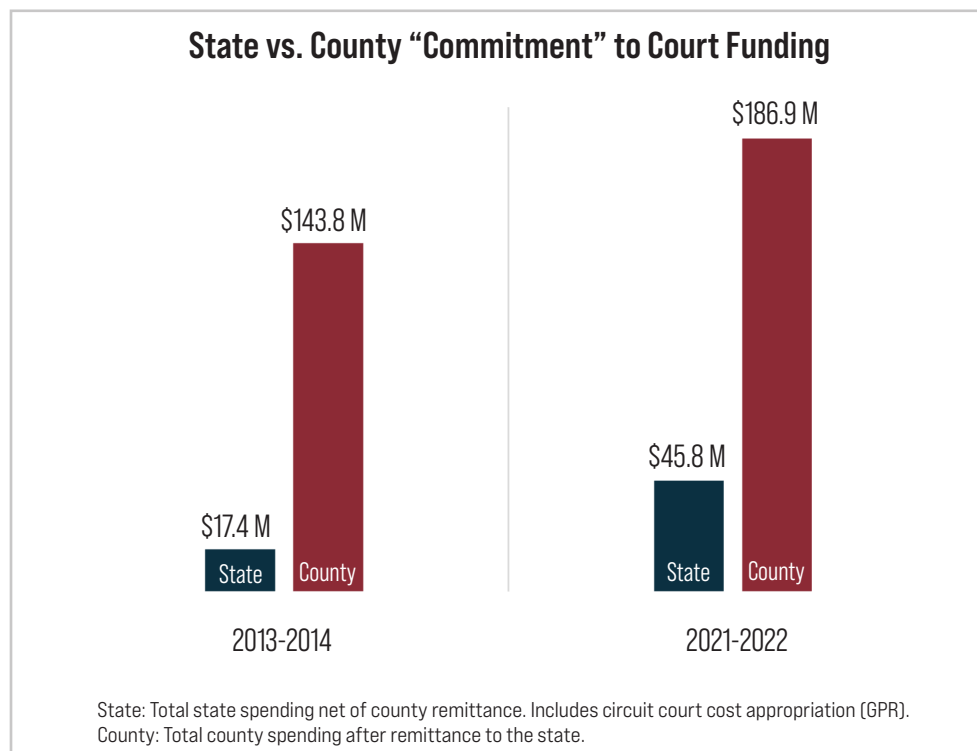


Langlade County Courthouse



Judicial and Public Safety

- **Increase the circuit court costs appropriation** to reflect a more equitable share between the state and counties.
- **Increase the Victim Witness Reimbursement** appropriation.
- **Increase the small claims filing fee**, which has not increased in more than 10 years, from the current \$22 to \$42 and allow the county to retain \$30.20 of the fee rather than \$10.20 as it currently retains.
- **Allow expert witnesses** to appear by videoconference in certain civil actions.
- **Increase state support** to county emergency management by increasing the expenditure authority of the Wisconsin Disaster Fund and expedite the process under Wis. Stat. 13.10 to ensure communities get the aid they require in a reasonable amount of time after a disaster.
- **Provide flexibility for retired officers** to be rehired without restrictions to collect their pension.
- **Eliminate the Department of Corrections' ability** to prorate probation and parole payments to jails.
- **Increase funding** for the statewide implementation of the Treatment Alternatives and Diversion Program and evidence-based decision making practices, including assistance in implementing new programs and training for employees.
- **Amend state statutes related to filing fees** in probate court. Provide for uniformity between fees charged in probate and fees charged by the Clerk of Court. In addition, support creation of statutory fees for items not currently subject to a filing fee in the Register in Probate office.



Court funding in Wisconsin was originally intended to be a "partnership" between the state and counties. Despite some increases in state funding, counties continue to provide the majority of funding for Wisconsin courts.



Taxation and Finance

- **Modify the current** annual levy limit adjustment to be based on the change in property values due to the greater of net new construction or 3%.
- **Exempt economic development and public safety** expenditures from levy limits.
- **Allow counties to engage** in short-term general obligation borrowing for operational expenses.
- **Allow counties to impose** a sales tax in excess of 0.5%, but not to exceed 1.5%.
- **Increase representation** in tax incremental financing decisions and increase transparency and predictability of tax incremental districts.
- **Provide annual inflationary increases** to county utility aid and include battery storage.
- **Enforce the Managed Forest Law property limits** by amending state law to close the LLC loophole.
- **Amend the tax deed process** to ensure counties are reimbursed for all costs associated with the tax foreclosure process.
- **Require municipal public budget hearings** to be held in a timely manner (e.g., by Nov. 15 or Nov. 20) to ensure municipal/county treasurers are able to deliver the property tax roll by statutory deadlines.
- **Clarify in state statute** what constitutes a “utility field” and a “solar field.”

Green County Courthouse





Health and Human Services

GENERAL

- **Regularly increase funding** for major state aid programs that support county human services, including the Community Aids Basic County allocation, Children and Families allocation, Youth Aids, and Income Maintenance Administration allocation.
- **Expand Medicaid eligibility** as allowed under the Affordable Care Act.
- **Establish a human service workforce grant program** to support the recruitment and retention of county human service staff.

AGING

- **Fully fund Aging** and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs).
- **Increase support** for family caregivers.
- **Support funding** for specialized transportation in counties.
- **Increase funding** for Home-Delivered Meal (HDM) Services.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

- **Provide full state Medicaid funding** for crisis services.
- **Provide full state Medicaid funding** for Community Support Programs.
- **Support additional funding** for Family Care managed care organizations to pay for placements in institutions for mental disease (IMDs) beyond the period of active mental health treatment.
- **Establish psychiatric** residential treatment facilities.
- **Increase the Medicaid reimbursement** per diem rate for crisis stabilization services.
- **Support ongoing funding** for the room and board costs of residential substance use disorder treatment

CHILD SUPPORT

- **Provide funding to modernize** the child support IT system (Thrive System).



CHILD WELFARE

- **Expand eligibility** for subsidized guardianship in youth justice cases under Chapter 938.
- **Implement the professional** foster care model statewide
- **Fund the education costs** in residential care centers.

LONG-TERM CARE FACILITIES

- **Maintain systemic payment relief**, including Medicaid rate increases, to support increased costs.
- **Support additional resources** for staff recruitment, training, and education to address the workforce shortage in long-term care facilities.
- **Create fair and equitable reimbursement rates** for Family Care providers to be more reflective of the costs of care and the workforce crisis.
- **Support efforts for people** living with dementia in skilled nursing and assisted living facilities by expanding the facility-based workforce, reforming payment, and addressing the associated regulatory challenges.
- **Allow certified nursing assistants** over 16 years of age to operate power-driven hoists.
- **Offer the Wisconsin Nurse Aide Competency Exam** in multiple languages.

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Health and Human Services *[continued...]*

ECONOMIC SUPPORT

- **Support funding for Shares Child Care Subsidy Program** changes to simplify eligibility and improve child care administration.

LONG-TERM SUPPORT

- **Eliminate the Children's Long Term Support maintenance of effort** requirement and replace it with increased funding in the state Medicaid budget.
- **Increase funding for the Birth to 3 program** and establish state financial responsibility for future increases in costs.
- **Increase funding for the adult** protective services system.
- **Increase funding for the Alzheimer's Family Caregiver Support Program.**



PUBLIC HEALTH

- **Build and retain public health infrastructure** through increased and flexible funding.
- **Preserve public health authority** for the control of communicable diseases and other public health threats.

